



Service Center NEWS

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U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Food and Agriculture Council

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CAMS Project Pilot Rolling; Promises Improved Service

The Combined Administrative Management System (CAMS) is a new computer software system that will help employees get quicker and more accurate administrative management services--financial management, contract procurement, and human resources services. The first test of the CAMS Project is a pilot of the human resources management system used by the three USDA Service Center Agencies--Natural Resources Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, and Rural Development.

CAMS is a USDA Service Center initiative that stems from the business process reengineering assignment. Like other Service Center initiatives, CAMS is a Service Center agency project with the bulk of the work done by a project team located in the Administrative Management Development Center in Beltsville, Maryland. The new CAMS is being designed to reduce cycle time,

eliminate non-value added steps, provide information directly to decision makers, standardize administrative processes, and empower employees.

The first CAMS pilot site became operational on June 22, 1998, in Gainesville, Florida, with a formal training session for Service Center staff. In addition to piloting the new software, Florida is also piloting the new common computing environment (CCE) technology equipment. The first three parts of the pilot include processing personnel action requests, administration of training programs and performance management. All of the employees serviced by the State Offices in Florida are part of the pilot.

Hans Heidenreich, Team Leader for the CAMS Project, said "It will make you rethink how you handle human resources in your state, e.g., do I really need to see this piece of paper? As we began the pilot in Florida back in June,

1998, our hope was to drive toward a common goal, bringing together one big happy family."

The pilot was developed and designed to learn more about system designs and processes by doing both system and business testing. The successes included learning about the system's capabilities and limitations, and getting all the "kinks and bugs" out. The pilot helped employees learn how CAMS works in a real environment and what the conversion issues are. The Florida experience verified these accomplishments.

The Florida pilot site employees developed a list of "bugs" with recommendations or enhancements to solve the problems. The staff provided the CAMS project team with information and data on how the system works, as well as real time information on system capabilities. In addition, the project team learned about the procedures and

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Pictured from left to right are Jack Brown, Administrative Officer, NRCS, Connie Charna, Human Resources Manager, Rural Development, Marie Davis, Personnel Management Specialist, NRCS, and Bonnie Kisko, Human Resources Clerk, NRCS, all learning the new Combined Administrative Management System at the first training session held in Gainesville, Florida, June, 1998.

Six States Implement New Customer Comment/Complaint Card System

The Quality Customer Service Team, a sub-team of the Service Center Implementation Team, sent members to six states this past summer to help implement a new customer comment/complaint card system to address customer service problems at USDA Service Centers. Team members met with representatives of the State Food and Agriculture Council (FAC) and Service Center employees in Arizona, Connecticut, Indiana, Rhode Island,

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processes that will be needed to convert the new system as the pilot is extended to the next states. In addition, the CAMS pilot team measured the system's impact on communications traffic, and the new CCE environment.

The real bonus was that the project team learned that the system does so much more than was anticipated and that it is easy and fast to use.

Staff from the next four pilot states—Pennsylvania, Indiana, Oregon and Arkansas—met in Indiana in September. Jeffrie Navarro, Personnel Management Specialist for Rural Development in Florida, told the group of employees in Indiana that the first of many successes of the pilot began when 11 administrative management employees from the Service Center Agencies were trained in the new system and were able to put their training to work directly as the first pilot was rolled out.

"We had a good experience," Navarro said. "We didn't really know what to expect. Hans promised us problems, and he didn't let us down! But even the problems were good learning experiences for us."

"You forget that you work for a specific agency," Navarro said. "We get together and have regular meetings and really help each other. The project is providing common policies and procedures for the three agencies. We submit comments as one group of users rather than three separate agencies because we're now all doing things the same way. We found that we can brainstorm and find one, better way to do things rather than do the same things three different ways."

"Our information technology people meet together and travel around the state to ensure that everyone is aware of all of the Information Technology problems and work them out together," Navarro said. "When you ask questions

you find that you learn from each other and from the project team members. We find working together is more efficient more effective and even fun."

As October begins, the CAMS project team is looking forward to even more from the new system as two major milestones are reached. First, the team will be "refreshing" Florida data so that the system can be retested with a clean slate, which will lead to bringing the system on-line in the very near future. Second, the pilot begins to move forward with expansion to the four other pilot states. This expansion of the pilot will give the CAMS team more insight into rollout procedures as well as determine how the system will respond in multiple State Offices.

To be sure all USDA field employees have access to the results of the CAMS project, any member of the CAMS Project Team listed in the web site at www.info.usda.gov/camsproject can provide additional information. ■

Major New USDA Building Opens in California

Members of the California Food and Agriculture Council made a pact 10 years ago to locate the Farm Service Agency, Rural Development, and Natural Resources Conservation Service state offices together. Spread among three cities, all within a 20-mile radius, the agency leaders regularly reaffirmed their commitment to collocate.

On October 16, in Davis, California, eight USDA agencies celebrated the grand opening of the largest USDA building outside of headquarters in Washington, D.C. and Kansas City, Missouri. The new Richard E. Lyng USDA Building houses the Farm Service Agency; Natural Resources Conservation Service, State and West Regional Office; Rural Development; two Risk Management Agency offices (Compliance and Regional Service Office); Agricultural Research Service, Office of Inspector General; Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration; and the Food Safety and Inspection Service. The three-story structure was built at a cost of \$15 million and is leased for 15 years by USDA. About 225 employees will work in the new location after the November 1998 move-in date.



Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman helps dedicate the opening of a new USDA office building in Davis, California, which will be home to eight USDA agencies.

Lyng, of Modesto, is the only Secretary of Agriculture to have come from California. The building was named in his honor.

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman, Former Secretary Richard Lyng, Deputy Secretary Richard Rominger, Rep. Vic Fazio, FSA State Executive Director, California FAC Chairman John Smythe, and other dignitaries gathered outside the new building to address the crowd.

"This is the agricultural center for California," said Rep. Vic Fazio, who worked with the California FAC to bring agencies under one roof. "A marriage of so many happy interests in one great concept comes to fruition."

Deputy Secretary Richard Rominger called the building a "great symbol of the unity of community, agriculture, the university, and government all coming together."

Secretary Glickman paid tribute to Lyng, noting Lyng's accomplishments for the appreciative audience. "This building celebrates a great life in American agriculture," Glickman said. "We're delighted to say thanks."

Former Agriculture Secretary Richard E. Lyng concluded the program. "It has been a great experience for me and my family to have been connected to agriculture all these years," Lyng said. ■

NFAC Aims to Cut Paper

Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman directed the National Food and Agriculture Council (NFAC) to help reduce the paperwork burden on farmers in July, 1997. Representatives from the Office of the Chief Information Officer, Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Risk Management Agency, Rural Business-Cooperative Service, and Rural Housing Service developed the Paperwork Reduction Project Plan that was submitted within 2 months to NFAC for implementation.

The project plan establishes implementation teams, defines and assesses the current information collection environment, identifies and evaluates opportunities for redesigning information collection processes, and makes recommendations for improvements.

A Paperwork Reduction Implementation Team (PRIT), led by Chris Niedermayer from the Farm Service Agency, was assembled to manage implementation of the project plan. OCIO, FSA, NRCS, and RMA are the principal agencies represented on the team. Support is provided by Office of Management and Budget and Office of the General Counsel. PRIT will make recommendations to NFAC for reducing the paperwork burden on USDA customers.

"Our goal is to make sure that information is collected once and shared many times by USDA Service Center employees and, as appropriate, with other public and private entities,"

Niedermayer said. "We need to keep in mind that many of our customers wear different hats at different times. One day they may be requesting an operating loan, on another requesting technical assistance for a conservation plan, and on others requesting approval for cost share or other program payments. We must position ourselves to reuse information that was collected through a previous transaction in order to facilitate true one-stop shopping."

From a practical perspective, this could include providing customers with forms, program contracts, etc., that are filled out with information already recorded in the service center computer system. The customer would then only have to add information that is missing or needs updating. The volume of information needed and the burden associated with providing it would thus be reduced. Further, the information could be provided electronically in a format such as a downloadable or on-line document, and reduce the amount of paperwork the customer has to deal with.

USDA is engaged in a broad initiative to consolidate the operations of its agencies that serve common production agriculture customers—namely farmers, ranchers, and landowners. Major partners in this initiative are the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and agencies within the Rural Development mission area.

PRIT is directly linked to many ongoing projects designed to consolidate

PRIT Project Goals

- Minimize paperwork for end customers
- Maximize the use of information collected by participating agencies
- Minimize the cost of collecting, securing, maintaining, using, and distributing information

common business processes. These projects address USDA's service delivery functions on programmatic and technical infrastructure levels.

"PRIT is integrating its efforts to identify redundant collections of the same information with the Service Center Implementation Team's effort to develop common data management methodologies and tools," Niedermayer said. "PRIT brings an information collection and burden perspective to an effort that is developing a common data dictionary and data base management system requirements in support of consolidated business processes."

PRIT is also working with teams that are identifying opportunities for reengineering common business processes to ensure that the efforts include a requirement for reusing information that has already been collected."

PRIT has a mandate to identify short-, medium-, and long-term improvements (6 months or less, 7 to 18 months, and greater than 18 months). Long-term implementation of adopted improvements will follow a series of pilot tests that have already started and are designed to prove the concepts work.

The pilots will provide real information on refined business and information technology requirements, as well as cost/benefit analysis to support the common computer environment in the Service Centers. This effort should also lead to standardizing the method by which information collection burden is calculated for use by Service Center partner agencies. Development of this methodology is being sponsored by the OCIO and may be expanded to other areas within USDA. ■

PRIT Objectives

- Help participating agencies understand and minimize the impact and cost of collecting information from customers
- Reduce time customers spend responding to information requirements
- Increase customer understanding of the need for collecting and using information collected
- Encourage agencies to share and reuse information provided
- Show customer and service center staff where to get information quickly and in the right format
- Capture project results and use for longer-term initiatives
- Identify and initiate policy, program, and legislative changes to remove barriers to improved information collection processes
- Ensure compliance with the Paperwork Reduction Act
- Identify immediate, interim, and long-term improvements that reduce paperwork

South Carolina, and Idaho, who are directly involved in receiving and tracking customer information from new comment/complaint cards.

As part of the new pilot, a single tracking system serving all three service center agencies provides a mechanism for follow-up on comments and complaints, as well as for collecting information that can help identify the strengths and weaknesses of the three Service Center agencies in customer service delivery. The comment and complaint system is easy to use for the customer, and operates as a state based activity.

"Why are we pilot testing a new system for receiving comments and complaints when some 90 percent of USDA's customers in the field consistently say they're happy with the service we provide?" asks Len Covello, Team Leader for the Quality Customer Service Team. "The answer is that 20 percent of all our customers feel we could be doing some things better—and of those few customers who are not satisfied at all, the overwhelming majority don't say anything to us about where we could improve."

"It also lets us know what it is that we're doing well," Covello said. "Knowing what our customers are getting from us in the ways that they want helps us figure out what we really shouldn't change in the middle of all the changes that are going on, and helps us determine how we can better serve them in other areas."

Past surveys have indicated that roughly 15 percent of those customers who said they never complained actually felt that some aspect of service delivery was inadequate, or they experienced problems about which they had a complaint but never told anyone. "We asked why they didn't say something," Covello said. "Many said there wasn't an easy way to do it and others had various concerns about speaking up. As a result the partner agencies do not have information on what's supposed to be broken, and don't know what changes or improvements could be made to fix things."

The new customer comment/complaint card system will make it easier for local customers to comment about the service they receive through USDA Service Centers. Customer service cards are available in every USDA Service Center in the pilot states, and customers

may either make comments or register complaints at the Service Center, or fill out the card later and mail it to the respective State Office. Each card has a tracking number so that if a customer wants to, a phone call can locate the comment or complaint in the system and tell the customer what is being done about his or her concerns.

State FACs will ensure that problems are resolved in a timely manner, and that at least an acknowledgment of a comment is received within 10 days. Compliments are forwarded to Service Center personnel. This customer service comment/complaint system will not in any way replace the existing Civil Rights or Appeals processes but should serve as a way to bring to light and solve problems that otherwise would not have been known.

In addition to the Customer Service Card, a 1-800 number was set up in each pilot state so that customers can speak directly to a Customer Service representative. This option for contacting USDA Service Centers may prove more convenient for some customers who prefer personal contact with USDA employees rather than conducting their business in writing. ■

Fight Against Hunger

Secretary Glickman asked USDA staffs across the country to help the hungry and "Make a difference in one month." From October 16 through November 16, 1998, the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Rural Development leadership committed to team up in a united fight against hunger under the auspices of the National Food and Agriculture Council.

Throughout the country, field offices of the three USDA Service Center agencies joined in the combined effort. Field staffs have already integrated gleaning and food recovery efforts into their daily work activities. The USDA Service Centers are reporting that employees are working together and getting great satisfaction from their projects.

The fight against hunger is not just a 1-month effort. The NFAC will work to include hunger activities as part of their outreach efforts so agencies will contin-

ue working together on a permanent basis. In Washington, D.C., the three agencies are working to hold one planned activity every month that employees will have an opportunity to volunteer and participate in.

Secretary Glickman wants USDA to take the lead in sharing and working together to help in the fight against hunger. Utah is taking an open approach, calling it "Utahns Against Hunger." Included in the plans for this effort are USDA's APHIS, Forest Service, Extension Service, National Agricultural Statistics Service, Aerial Photography Field Office; the Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management; the Utah Department of Food and Agriculture, and the Utah Department of Natural Resources. ■

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